

Every 15 Minutes Someone Died

By Jane Kreidler (A6868)

The Every 15 Minutes program is a two-day, gut-wrenching experience for high school students. Teens are pulled out of class by the grim reaper every 15 minutes to reflect the cold reality that every 15 minutes a teenager in the United States is killed or injured in a traffic-related collision.

Recently, Delta High School in Clarksburg got a reality check during its Every 15 minutes program. The school of approximately 300 students is located south of Sacramento.

The mock DUI collision took place in front of the school. Emergency personnel responded and the jaws of life were used to remove students from the vehicles. A senior, Sara Hiromoto was sitting in the front passenger seat and was

thrown on top of the car's hood. Her bloodstained, lifeless body was removed from the hood and she was pronounced dead at the scene. The DUI driver, 17-year-old Doralyn Hernandez, was arrested. The passengers in the back seat of the car were severely injured. Jake Wagner died at the hospital and John Lopes was paralyzed and came to his friends' funeral in a wheelchair. Miss Shanan Lindahl, a popular agriculture teacher, also died.

After the crash and the students dying every 15 minutes, those involved in the program spent the remainder of the day and evening at a retreat which focused on the day's events. They reflected on the ordeal and wrote letters to their parents describing their feelings. The kids were genuinely affected by the program.

These four students coordinated the Every 15 Minutes Program. From left: Pam Snook, Carolyn Montzingo, Ashley Garamendi and Joe Gonzalez.



John Lopes was paralyzed in the alcohol-involved crash.



Vice-Principal Richard Bagby addressed the parents and students.

For the parents, friends, students and faculty left behind, a candlelight vigil was held at 6 p.m. in front of the make-shift cemetery. The headstones bore the deceased students' names, pictures, and dates of birth and death. Pastor Dennis Montzingo from the Clarksburg Community Church comforted the mourners and others spoke expressively from their hearts about the consequences of drinking and driving, and about past memories.

At the assembly on the next day, the casket was placed in the center of the auditorium and the "living dead"



A CHP officer administers field sobriety tests to the DUI driver.



Fire Department personnel extricate the crash victims with the jaws of life.

entered. A video was shown of the now-deceased teacher and students enjoying school and friends before the deadly crash. There wasn't a dry eye in the house. Some of the "living dead" wept uncontrollably during the assembly. A guest speaker from Mothers Against Drunk Driving gave stirring testimony of the DUI crash she was involved in. Parents read their letters to their "deceased" children through a sea of tears.

The saying commonly used by teens, it won't happen to me, can't be farther from the harsh reality that Every 15 Minutes someone dies in an alcohol-related crash. Make the choice to make it to your future and do not drink and drive or get into a car with someone who has. ■



The graveyard is filled with the "living dead."